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SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND PRM/AFR
ADDIS ABABA FOR REFCOORD

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SUBJECT: CITING SECURITY CONCERNS, GODJ DENIES ACCESS TO SINGLE MALE
SOMALI REFUGEES

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 593

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Citing national security concerns, Djibouti's Ministry of the Interior decided August 3 to bar all young, single male Somali asylum seekers from entering Djibouti. GODJ officials are concerned about the possibility that Al-Shabaab elements might try to infiltrate Djibouti by posing as refugees. During joint GODJ-UNHCR screenings conducted at Djibouti's border with Somalia on August 3 and 5, only families and vulnerable applicants were allowed interviews, with UNHCR reporting that 14 single males were denied permission to enter Djiboutian territory on August 3. UNHCR continues to reinforce to GODJ officials its position that all South/Central Somalis should have access to protection in Djibouti, and that full screening of all applicants, rather than a blanket disqualification for one certain group, is the appropriate tool for addressing security concerns. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Early on August 3, Minister of the Interior Yacin Elmi Bouh decided to close Djibouti's southern border to all undocumented single males originating from Somalia, including asylum seekers claiming to be of South/Central Somali origin. UNHCR Representative Ann Encontre told RSO that this decision followed media coverage on August 2 of renewed Al-Shabaab threats against Djibouti, and was motivated by national security concerns that Al-Shabaab elements might try to infiltrate Djibouti by posing as legitimate refugees or asylum seekers. No time frame was given for the duration of the restriction.

3. (SBU) Later in the day on August 3, UNHCR and the Ministry of the Interior's National Office for Assistance to Refugees and Disaster Stricken People (ONARS) conducted a joint screening of asylum seekers at the Loyada border post between Djibouti and Somalia. According to UNHCR, 14 single males aged 18-42 were refused access to Djiboutian territory during the screening, as per the ministerial decision. The 14 remained outside Djiboutian territory, although UNHCR predicted that some would likely try to seek entry illegally through other non-official border crossings. Only families and vulnerable applicants were interviewed in "no man's land," with 5 Somali families/16 persons from southern Somalia granted entry as refugees after simplified screening procedures. According to ONARS, the bar against single men does not extend to men arriving as part of family groups. UNHCR reported that the policy of excluding young single men continued during the next joint screening on August 5, although information on the number of applicants turned away was not yet available.

4. (SBU) Encontre said that despite the new ministerial decision, UNHCR's position remained that all South/Central Somalis should have access to protection. Applicants suspected of involvement in "1F" activities under the 1951 Convention Related to the Status of

Refugees should undergo a full-fledged refugee status determination (RSD), she said. "For reasons of national security and given the vulnerability of the Djibouti border," Encontre told RSO, UNHCR would "advise the screening of all applicants and not the application of restrictive policies leading to uncontrolled, illegal movements." She also noted that UNHCR was following up on cases of two Somalis reportedly arrested and detained since August 2 in Ali Sabieh on national security grounds.

15. (SBU) COMMENT. Post will continue to monitor this situation closely. As UNHCR has noted, the current prohibition on single male Somalis echoes Djibouti's stance in May of this year, when GODJ officials argued that some unaccompanied males of military age among a group of 52 Somali migrants offloaded in Djibouti from the USS Lake Champlain did not qualify for refugee status in Djibouti (reftel). END COMMENT.
WONG